

VZCZCXRO0280
PP RUEHQU
DE RUEHPU #1343/01 2061118
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 251118Z JUL 06 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3596
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1136
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0779
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0296
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC 0519
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0945
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001343

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL EAID KDEM HA

SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTIONS: CHALLENGES AND RISKS

PORT AU PR 00001343 001.3 OF 003

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Although no date has been set for remaining national level elections or the municipal and local contests, Prime Minister Alexis has informally suggested that all be held together by the end of November. Both Electoral Commission Director General Jacques Bernard and MINUSTAH elections chief Gerardo Lechevallier report that it is technically feasible to hold the elections by this date if/if funding is secured from the international donors. However, both also expressed concerns about the risks of violence and insecurity surrounding local races. The personalization of local contests increases the likelihood of conflict, they say, while MINUSTAH will be spread thinly in view of the number of local contests. A long-delayed first-round legislative race in Grande Saline -- now scheduled for July 30 -- may provide a preview of the challenges to be faced in other elections. The Grande Saline vote was cancelled twice earlier this year due to risks of violence, but has been rescheduled for July 30, despite continued tensions in the district. The warnings by Bernard and Lechevallier are a useful reminder that, despite the success of the presidential and parliamentary elections, we must not be lulled into a false confidence about prospects for local and municipal races. End summary.

¶2. (U) ADCM and Poloff met with Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) Director General (DG) Jacques Bernard July 11 and with MINUSTAH's Electoral Assistance Section (EAS) chief Gerardo Lechevallier July 13 to review status and plans for completing the electoral process in Haiti. At the national level, second round contests to decide the three senate seats for the North East Department and ten deputies are pending. In addition, in Grande Saline, Artibonite Department, the electoral process was halted twice due to violent behavior on the part of candidates, poll watchers, and voters necessitating a third attempt at a first round contest, announced last week by the CEP to be held July 30. No date has been announced for the other remaining parliamentary and municipal/local contests. However, Prime Minister Alexis informally told the Donors Core Group in June that the government wanted to see these remaining races completed by November 30.

Grande Saline - Third Time Lucky?

¶3. (SBU) The CEP announced on July 18 that the

twice-canceled Grande Saline parliamentary election will be held on July 30. The Grande Saline district was the scene of violence during both the February 7 and April 21 election days requiring that voting be halted and the voting centers closed on both occasions. The February 7 disturbance resulted in one death. DG Bernard attributes the volatile situation existing in Grande Saline to political party and familial in-fighting primarily between the Lespwa and Fusion candidates. The state of affairs is further complicated by apparently long-simmering family disputes that cut across political party lines; three of the eight candidates are related. Some candidates and political parties in the Grande Saline district have complained that the voting centers were not appropriately distributed on the previous election days. The CEP, in a questionable decision according to Bernard, agreed to relocate the voting centers for the upcoming election. However, this has only resulted in further tension, with one candidate's supporters cutting off both roads into and out of the small commune of Rossignol, where a new polling station is to be added. Lechevallier told us July 22 that all candidates had now agreed on the locations of the polling centers. A CEP training session for party pollwatchers is scheduled for July 26; if that goes smoothly, Lechevallier is hopeful the elections will be peaceful.

¶4. (SBU) DG Bernard told Emboffs that he thinks it is a mistake to go forward now with the Grande Saline election. While technically it could be completed, the volatile situation in the district argues for caution in proceeding. He warned that MINUSTAH may find itself in an untenable situation if it intervenes to stop violence in this fraught local contest. There is widespread acceptance of MINUSTAH's responsibility to shoot gang leaders, he said, but the optics will change entirely if MINUSTAH is perceived as "blocking innocent Haitians who only want to exercise their democratic right to vote." In addition to these security concerns,

PORT AU PR 00001343 002.3 OF 003

Bernard noted that, since it is the rainy season and the terrain of the district is predominantly marshy, there will be additional logistical complications.

Future Races - Still Technical Challenges

¶5. (SBU) Bernard stated confidently that the remaining parliamentary and municipal/local elections could be held approximately 10-12 weeks from a firm announcement of a date if the funding was available. Yet, both he and Lechevallier admitted there would be significant technical challenges. The municipal elections are for three mayors in each of 143 municipalities and the local/communal elections include over 10,000 offices for which at least 40,000 candidates are expected. Because of the multitude and nature of offices open, one of the major issues in preparing for the municipal and local elections will be the ballot preparation and printing. Lechevallier estimated that 70 days would be required for the ballot printing, and that of course this could begin only after all candidate registration was complete. He noted a very high error rate with ballot preparation in the much-simpler parliamentary contests.

¶6. (SBU) Another complication is that electoral boundaries still have to be set between the larger Haitian cities and adjacent communes whose borders have blurred over time. Poor-record keeping and inconsistent address conventions mean that many residents don't really know in which commune they reside or should vote. Lechevallier was guardedly hopeful that voter allocation to correct communes could be handled using the existing database, without the need to re-register any voters. Determination of the boundaries is also a necessary precursor to determining candidate lists, since candidates must be residents of the cities/communes where they run.

¶7. (SBU) Lechavallier pointed out that it has now been more

than a year since citizens had an opportunity to register to vote. The rolls are closed since, technically, elections are still underway pending completion of the left-over parliamentary contests. But the longer local and municipal elections are delayed, the more pressure may build to re-open registration. He estimates that 50,000 Haitians become eligible to vote, in addition to those already eligible who did not register before but may wish to now. On a related note, Bernard is concerned about a possible move to shift responsibility for issuance of voter registration cards from the CEP to the Ministry of Justice, as mandated in a decree issued by the interim government. He worries that turning this function over to a line ministry risks politicizing the registration process.

18. (SBU) Bernard and Lechevallier differed significantly over the budget required to complete elections. Bernard's budget is USD 13.5 million, which is less than the latest MINUSTAH budget of USD 18 million. Among other issues, Bernard faulted the MINUSTAH EAS budget for its inclusion of support for "expensive" international staff -- some of whom have no clear function during the prolonged wait for elections -- and queried whether the MINUSTAH helicopter flights to retrieve the process verbaux (official vote tallies from each polling place) were necessary and, even if so, why the elections budget would be charged for such assistance. Lechevallier notes, on the other hand, that the CEP budget includes only \$2.5 million for CEP operating expenses, which would cover only ten weeks of CEP overhead. Neither the DG's nor MINUSTAH's budgets include funding for institution and capacity building for the CEP. Bernard acknowledged that CEP infrastructure costs about \$1 million per month, so the longer elections are delayed the higher the price tag for keeping the CEP in place. (Note: AID's Justice, Democracy, and Governance office understands that the monthly cost is borne by the GOH, and should not figure in MINUSTAH's calculations, but this needs to be clarified. End note.)

All Politics is Local

19. (SBU) Both Bernard and Lechevallier warned about the risk of violence associated with local and municipal elections.

POR AU PR 00001343 003.2 OF 003

Bernard is worried about the security climate that may be ushered in by the close and fierce local electoral contests, such as he sees already in Grande Saline. Local contests are more personalized. They involve visible access to community resources. Lechevallier agreed that the municipal and local elections present a potentially more emotional situation. Due to this, these elections will have to be "scrupulously above board." According to Lechevallier, this means that adequate time and money must be invested to assure success. Otherwise, in Haiti's 140 communes, "you're going to have 140 Grandes Salines." Lechevallier also stated flatly that MINUSTAH simply doesn't have the forces to protect the estimated 1600 polling centers that will be required for the municipal and local contests.

Comment

10 (SBU) Comment: Much work remains, but if the GOH decides to proceed with elections by November 30, it appears the CEP could hold the remaining parliamentary races and probably the local/municipal contests by then -- although it will be tight. In view of the continued, unhelpful, differences in the CEP and MINUSTAH electoral budgets, it may be useful to have a USG-funded elections expert visit to assess the two proposals and assist us and other donors to determine actual needs. Both Bernard and Lechavallier offer a useful warning that local and municipal elections are likely to prove more complicated and perhaps prone to violence than the national-level contests. We'll watch closely the

twice-cancelled parliamentary race in Grande Saline as a possible preview of what's to come. End Comment.
SANDERSON